

COLGATE & COMPANY JERSEY CITY PLANT: B-15  
(Colgate-Palmolive Company Jersey City Plant: B-15)  
90-96 Greene Street  
Jersey City  
Hudson County  
New Jersey

HAER No. NJ-71-0

HAER  
NJ  
9-JERC1,  
182-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD  
Northeast Field Area  
Chesapeake/Allegheny System Support Office  
National Park Service  
U.S. Custom House  
200 Chestnut Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

Colgate & Company Jersey City Plant: B-15  
(Colgate-Palmolive Company Jersey City Plant: B-15)

HAER No. NJ-71-0

Location: 90-96 Greene Street, Jersey City, New Jersey

Present Owner/Occupant: Colgate-Palmolive Company  
300 Park Avenue  
New York, New York 10022

Present Use: Demolished

Significance: B-15 was significant as the first toilet soap factory built by Colgate & Company in Jersey City, and as one of the earliest structures at the Jersey City plant which survived in 1988. It was used predominantly for toilet soap finishing c1855-1986, and also housed early plant electric lighting facilities before World War I. Located in the Exchange Place area of Jersey City, the structure was part of B Block, the plant's historic core. The brick-bearing building was characteristic of mid- to third-quarter 19th-century industrial design which utilized Romanesque Revival features, and was the only structure of its kind built along the east side of Greene Street at this time. Decorative features on the multi-section four-story building were confined to the exterior masonry, and included a granite basement level, round- and segmentally-arched window openings, and a brick entablature. B-15 was built in several stages, and modified as the plant needs dictated. It was demolished in 1989.

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## Part I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION\*

### A. Physical History:

1. Date(s) of erection: B-15 had complex and somewhat mysterious origins, and was built in three sections described below: north and south sections on Greene Street, and an east section fronting the alley through B Block (hereinafter, B-15 north, B-15 south, and B-15 east). B-15 east may have been earliest, begun c1850; B-15 south was built c1853-1866; and B-15 north was built c1870 (Hudson County Deed Books 1847, 1853, 1869; Dripps 1850; Culver 1866; Washington Fire Insurance Company of New York 1872; Hopkins 1873).
2. Architect: Unknown
3. Original and subsequent owner(s): Colgate and Company; Colgate-Palmolive-Peet Company; Colgate-Palmolive Company (Hudson County Deed Books 1847, 1853, 1869).
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Unknown.
5. Original plans and construction: No 19th-century plans or drawings of B-15 survive. Framing and interior wall divisions, described below, clearly indicated the three sections were not contemporary. William Colgate purchased land including the site of the 20-by-70-foot B-15 east in 1847; maps by Dripps (1850) and Culver (1866) indicate this section arose between the times of map publication. A vertical seam in the brickwork of this section, south of the two northern bays of windows facing the alley, suggests the unconfirmed possibility that this section was built in two episodes (HAER NO. NJ-71, B BLOCK ALLEY TO NORTH...). No photographs, views, or early descriptions of B-15 east are known, but it appears to have been in relatively original condition in 1988 except for some window infilling, the door and sheds noted below in the alley, and the removal of the west wall when the east, north, and south sections were joined (Figures 1 and 3; see HAER No. NJ-71-D, Figure 2).
6. Alterations and additions: Colgate acquired the site of the B-15 south in 1853. The 35-by-70-foot section was in place by 1866 (Culver 1866). It is possible that the B-15 south predated B-15 east; the fragments of a north-south wall, which once separated the B-15 east from B-15 north and south, make this sequence ambiguous. However, since the Colgate plant made "Fancy Soap" by no later than 1850, and B-15 was the only known site of such production through the 19th century, it is most likely that B-15 east

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\* Capitalized references are photographs included with this documentation, or with other documentation packages for HAER No. NJ-71 and associated structures.

was earlier (Colgate & Company n.d.; Washington Fire Insurance Company of New York 1872).

The earliest known photograph of B-15 (in Farrier 1879) shows the south section's Greene Street elevation substantially as it remained in 1988. Post-1866 modifications to B-15 south are undocumented, but included a variety of interior framing alterations, the addition of a 20-century rooftop annex for adjacent B-14 (HAER NO. NJ-71-N), and the raising of the fourth floor to match the level of B-15 north section c1870 (cf. windows and window levels in SOUTH HALF, WEST ELEVATION...; FOURTH FLOOR, HOTEL SOAP LINES TO NORTHWEST; and HAER NO. NJ-71, B-1 (LEFT) AND NORTH HALF OF B-15, WEST ELEVATIONS).

Colgate & Company bought the site of B-15 north and B-1 (HAER No. NJ-71-D) in 1869, from jewelry manufacturer Brenton B. Grinnell. Grinnell probably built B-1 c1850 as a structure of about 50 by 65 feet, covering all of the parcel purchased in 1869, and had his business there until at least 1869 (Jersey City directories, 1849-1869; Dripps 1850). Colgate & Company occupied part of the structure by 1866 and purchased it in 1869, as it expanded its original Jersey City facilities. Grinnell's firm, or another jewelry manufacturer, continued to use part of the structure into the 1870s under an arrangement not yet documented (Culver 1866; Washington Fire Insurance Company of New York 1872). The continued presence of this other firm may explain why Colgate chose to demolish much of B-1 and build a different, connecting structure to the south c1870 (see HAER No. NJ-71, B-1 (LEFT) AND NORTH HALF OF B-15, WEST ELEVATIONS). B-15 north was integrated with the earlier B-15 sections by removing or opening walls, and by raising the B-15 south fourth floor as noted. This integration was only interior, however; the north and south sections had different west facades and rooflines. As with B-15 south, B-15 north underwent little exterior alteration (cf. Farrier 1879 and HAER No. NJ-71, B-1 (LEFT) AND NORTH HALF OF B-15, WEST ELEVATIONS).

Modern alterations included undocumented framing reinforcement, partition additions, partial interior wall removals, and window replacement, described below. An undocumented elevator on the south wall was removed sometime after 1943 (Figure 4). A steel-framed pulley monorail installed in the through-block alley in 1975 allow for movement of heavy equipment in and out of the first floor shops (Colgate-Palmolive Company 1975 [plans]).

B. Historical context:

Information on 19th-century operations at the Colgate plant is limited, but maps and an 1872 insurance inventory indicate that B-15 was built and used as the plant's only toilet or fancy soap factory until the 1903 addition of adjacent B-14 (HAER NO. NJ-71-N; see Culver 1866; Washington Fire Insurance Company of New York 1872; Hopkins 1873; Bromley 1887). Until sometime after 1872, the Fancy Soap Factory and Delivery Department (former Building A) was a multi-structure complex facing both Creene and York streets, surrounding B-1 (HAER No. NJ-71-D) at the street corner, in an unusual plan which may reflect Brenton Grinnell's ownership of B-1 until 1869. Building A included all or part of B-15 and B-2 (HAER No. NJ-71-E), and was equipped with a steam engine, soap kettles or vats, and other equipment in an undocumented arrangement including line shafts and belt drives. The steam engine, probably powered from a boiler in an engine and boiler house across the alley (demolished by 1916), most likely ran some early soap mills and chipping machines. The absence of a boiler in Building A suggests that no kettle soap was made in B-15; rather, small kettles or vats were used to remelt framed kettle soap from the plant's main, steam-powered kettle houses (later designated B-3 and B-4, HAER Nos. NJ-71-f and NJ-71-C; see Libert 1931).

There is no evidence of a steam engine in B-2; later, fragmentary evidence of power equipment in the B-15 basement suggests this was always the site of the Fancy Soap Factory's engine (Colgate & Company 1906 [plans]; Figure 2). Several generations of steam engine in B-15, including a long-stroke type driving a 68.5-by-20-inch pulley, a Fleming piston-valve type, and a 60-hp Westinghouse engine, powered equipment in the factory above. The presence of the engines may also explain the location of the maintenance shops on the first floors of B-15 and later B-14: no other B Block areas had, in the same building, power equipment requiring maintenance, and engines which could power machine or carpenter shop tools as well as production equipment. By the early 20th century, the B-15 steam engines also ran two small AC generators for lighting, but evidently never ran electrically-powered line shafting. The engines were removed after the undocumented installation of electric-motor-driven machines at the plant, which probably occurred c1915-30, and the use of more purchased and plant-generated electricity following the 1914 construction of the new Boiler House and Engine House on C Block (HAER Nos. NJ-71-T and NJ-71-W).

In Colgate terminology, B-15 toilet soap manufacture followed the "English Process" until c1905, when the faster and more mechanized "French Milled Process" was introduced (Libert 1931; see HAER No. NJ-71). B-14 was probably built to accommodate the larger equipment needed for the new procedures. The older method used more portable equipment; B-15 manufacturing arrangements did not require many permanent installations. Except for undocumented soap mills installed on the third floor, and a soap chip dryer used on the fourth floor

c1940-65, B-15 was used primarily for cutting, pressing, wrapping, and packing of soap throughout its history, particularly on the second and fourth floors. The third floor included a small cafeteria and a supervisors' locker room by the 1960s, while the first floor housed machine, pipe, and tinsmith shops by no later than 1930 and the basement was gradually absorbed by mechanical parts storage as the steam engines were removed (Jacobs 1931; Factory Mutual Engineering Association 1962-79; cf. Figure 3 and HAER NO. NJ-71-N, Figure 2). Hotel and toilet soap production continued until 1986.

## Part II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General statement:

1. Architectural character: B-15 was a combination of three structures with separate facades and a joined interior. B-15 north was a four-story, asymmetrically-composed, Romanesque-Revival-influenced, brick bearing industrial building with a five-bay west facade. Characterized by a tri-partite horizontal facade division into base, body and attic, the structure had round- and segmentally-arched windows, a granite block basement, belt courses for horizontal division and a brick entablature. B-15 south was a four-story, symmetrically-composed, utilitarian, brick bearing industrial building with a four-bay west facade. Ornament was limited to round blind arches with inset windows on the ground floor, a dentillated brick entablature and brownstone basement, lintels and sills. B-15 east was a four-story, one-bay-wide utilitarian structure, with seven windows per floor along a stark east facade. The only ornament consisted of quatrefoil anchor-bolt washers.
2. Condition of fabric: When surveyed in 1988, B-15 was in very good condition.

### B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The three sections combined created a slightly deformed rectangular plan with a maximum east-west width of 70 feet. B-15 north and B-15 south combined were 76.5 feet long north-south, and 50 feet wide along the northernmost 6 feet at the corner of B-2 (HAER No. NJ-71-E). B-15 east was 70 feet long and 20 feet wide (Figure 3).
2. Foundations: Brick piers and 16- to 22-inch-thick brick walls, presumably resting on stone footings, supported B-15. In B-15 north, 24-inch-square brick piers with stone belt courses, on about 10-foot-centers in two rows 15 feet apart, supported 9.5-by-10-inch wood girders and 11-by-4-inch basement ceiling joists. B-15 south had a single row 20-inch-square brick piers, on irregular 11-to-15-foot centers, supporting 13.5-by-11.5-inch wood girders. The original brick wall between B-15 north and B-15 south supported basement ceiling joists in both sections.

3. Walls: Each section of B-15 had one exterior wall. The B-15 north facade had four stories and five bays, in a Romanesque-Revival-inspired asymmetrical composition with a tri-partite horizontal division of spaces into base, body and attic. The machine-made brick facade, laid in a stretcher bond-only with butter joints and pink-tinted mortar, was fenestrated with both round- and segmentally-arched windows with flush flat arches and no exterior door (HAER No. NJ-71, B-1 (LEFT) AND NORTH HALF OF B-15, WEST ELEVATIONS).

The base of B-15 north consisted of the basement and ground floor. The basement was ornamented with a chiseled, rough-faced granite block water table. The northernmost basement window was in-filled with concrete; the remaining four basement bays had lightwells. The ground floor had five segmentally-arched window bays with bluestone sills and flush gauged brick segmental arches. The windows were originally 6/6 double-hung wood sash, retained in the second, fourth and fifth bays from the north behind security mesh. The third bay from the north was brick in-filled. The remaining windows in B-15 north were infilled with obscure glass block with hoppers and louvers for ventilation.

A continuous sill course of bluestone with drip sill portions underneath the second-floor windows separated the base of B-15 north from the second-and-third-story body. The second floor segmentally-arched windows, each a single gauged brick in width, were narrower than the 1-1/2-gauged-brick-wide first-floor window arches. The third floor windows were round-arched, with arches 1-1/2 gauged bricks wide. The windows were connected by a flush stone springing line, possibly of brownstone, which was almost invisible due to the heavy accumulation of dirt on the building surface.

The body of the B-15 north facade was separated from the attic by a continuous fourth floor sill course. The fourth-floor windows were the most detailed, with round-arched masonry openings and inset brick interior arches. The exterior flush arches ended at a sandstone springing line but continued down as brick pilasters with outwardly stepped bases (two steps formed by two bricks in each direction). The interior inset arches provided the space for this three-dimensional effect and created a dramatic shadow line.

The B-15 north entablature consisted of a two-step dentil architrave supporting a billet course below a plain frieze. The cornice was a smaller course of dentils and stone coping.

B-15 south had a four-story, four-bay, utilitarian brick facade, with some Romanesque Revival detailing cruder in nature and materials than that seen in the later B-15 north. The detailing was much more simplistic, on a facade of badly-repointed, common, rough bricks laid in a seven-stretcher, single-header bond with wide joints (SOUTH HALF, WEST ELEVATION...).

The B-15 south basement had a cement-parged water table (probably brownstone) with four lightwell-surrounded windows. The ground floor had a series of four round blind arches with inset windows. The blind arches were inset from the wall, allowing the three-dimensional effect of five pilasters with bases protruding from the basement water table. The original windows were 6/6 double hung wood sash, retained in the middle two ground-floor bays. The end ground-floor bays had altered wood sash windows. Security mesh covered all ground-floor windows. The windows above in B-15 south were replaced with obscure glass block with hopper and louvers for ventilation. All windows had flush brownstone lintels, with cement-parged ground-floor sills and cast-concrete drip sills above.

The B-15 south entablature consisted of a single brick stretcher course for the architrave and one for the top of the plain, flush frieze. The cornice was a course of two-brick-wide dentils surmounted by a coping three bricks wide.

The extremely utilitarian four-story B-15 east facade was of common-bond common brick. On all floors but the first, there were originally seven rectangular windows with 12/12 double-hung wood sash, bluestone sills, and brownstone lintels. The second and seventh ground-floor bays from the north were fire-door-protected doorways (see II.B.7 below). Canopied shop areas obscured the windows in the third through sixth ground-floor bays from the north; an air conditioner was inserted in the first bay, north of the door. Only the quatrefoil cast-iron washers punctuated this unrelieved facade (HAER NO. NJ-71, B BLOCK ALLEY TO NORTH...; B BLOCK ALLEY TO SOUTH).

4. Structural systems, framing: B-15 was a composite, brick bearing structure with wood columns and wood floors. A few columns were replaced with cast-iron or steel I-beam members. The single row of columns in B-15 south, which divided that section into two 16.6-foot-wide bays, extended into B-15 east. The double row of columns in B-15 north created three bays with 8-, 15-, and 15-foot widths north to south, but did not extend into B-15 east. Wood joists in B-15 east ran east-west, supported by pockets in the east wall and a variety of wood beams along the former north-south wall common to the three sections. Joists in B-15 north and B-15 south ran north-south, supported by pockets in the three east-west brick walls and wood beams on the columns (Figure 3).
5. Shed, stoop, headhouse: Two corrugated-metal-sided open sheds along the alley protected areas for welding and scrap storage. The north door in the alley had a simple three-step wood stoop with a pipe-rail bannister. The southeast corner of the B-15 south roof had a single-story, steel-frame stucco-sided headhouse with two dormer-like skylights housing fans; this was an addition to the fifth floor of B-14 (HAER No. NJ-71-N), and could not be accessed from B-15 (HAER NO. NJ-71, B BLOCK ALLEY TO NORTH...; B BLOCK ALLEY TO SOUTH).



6. Vents: The interior was ventilated through a series of vents on the roof.
  7. Openings:
    - a. Doorways and doors: In the alley wall, 7.3- and 5-foot-wide rectangular openings in the second and seventh bays from the north, respectively, provided the only exterior access, protected by sliding metal-clad fire doors. Entry into B-15 was otherwise through wall openings from B-1, B-2 and B-14 (HAER Nos. NJ-71-D, NJ-71-D, NJ-71-N).
    - b. Windows and shutters: Most original west facade windows were replaced with obscure-glass-block infill; those which survived were wood, double-hung 6/6 sash. Except where brick-infilled, most original wood, double-hung 12/12 sash east facade windows were retained.
  8. Roof:
    - a. Shape, covering: The split shed roof of B-15 inclined in two separate directions: B-15 north sloped away from Green Street while B-15 south slopes towards Greene Street. Both roof sections were wood plank with asphalt cladding, and extended over the east section (FOURTH FLOOR TO SOUTHWEST).
    - b. Cornice, eaves: See Section II.B.3.
    - c. Hoppers: B-15 south had a steel platform with hoppers.
- C. Description of interior:
1. Floorplans: Except as noted below, B-15 floorplans were generally open and rectangular, interrupted by columns in the north and south sections, and divided by remains of the original brick partition wall between these sections between the basement and third floors. Fragments of the removed west wall of B-15 east also survived at the south end of the building, and at the former junction of the walls dividing the three sections. A 26-by-39-inch brick piers marked the latter point, and supported large wooden beams (Figure 3).
    - a. Basement: The basement housed a locker room and enclosures for showers and water closets. A concrete-block wall separated most of B-15 east from the other sections.
    - b. First Floor: This floor housed tinsmith, pipe, electrical, and welding shops (Figure 3), along with wood-partitioned water closets. The brick partition wall was intact, with a round-arched opening separating the north and south sections (FIRST FLOOR, PIPE SHOP TO WEST).

- c. Second Floor: The partition wall had a round-arched opening as on the first floor, but about 10 feet of the wall to the north was removed to create a rectangular opening with a wood lintel and a decorative cast iron column. The large brick pier at the east end of the wall was left as a column (SECOND FLOOR TO NORTH). West of the arched opening, there was an infilled south-facing chimney with a stovepipe opening.
  - d. Third Floor: A wood-partitioned supervisor's locker room occupied B-15 north, with the south wall of this room formed by the brick partition wall. The arched opening seen on floors below was bricked up, and replaced by a wood man-door inserted in the wall further west. The chimney feature seen on the second floor also appeared here. The southwest-most bay of this floor, in B-15 south, was a metal-partitioned cafeteria. The southeast corner of the building, in B-15 east, had a wooden enclosure with a sliding wooden door.
  - e. Fourth Floor: The brick partition wall was here removed entirely and replaced with wood columns (FOURTH FLOOR TO SOUTH-WEST).
- 2. Stairways: The only interior stairways in B-15 were two wood ones leading from the northeast corner of the first floor to basement sections of B-15 east and B-15 north (Figure 3). Inter-floor access was via the B-14 stairwell (HAER No. NJ-71-N).
  - 3. Flooring: The basement had a poured concrete floor. Other floors were of wood, selectively reinforced with metal plates.
  - 4. Wall and ceiling finish: The wood ceilings and brick walls had painted surfaces.
  - 5. Openings:
    - a. Doorways and doors: Interior access was provided through heavy, metal-clad fire doors in the north wall of B-15 connecting with B-1, through a masonry arch to B-2, and through the south wall of B-15 into B-14.
    - b. Windows: Most of the original windows were replaced with obscure glass block infill, except as noted above.
  - 6. Decorative features and trim: There were cast-iron star-shaped washers in the east wall facing the alley.

7. Industrial Equipment: Aside from standard tools and equipment found in the first-floor shops, the only industrial equipment remaining in 1988 was on the fourth floor. Four hotel-soap finishing lines along the west side of the building were intact, each with a manual cutters, horizontal die press, and automatic wrapping machine, all linked by short conveyors. There was also a small portable belt-lacing device near the finishing lines. Comparison of property numbers on these machines with numbers on a 1943 drawing of soap lines on this floor, and with property files, indicate that many of these machines were used on this floor for about fifty years (Colgate-Palmolive-Peet Company 1943 [plans]; Figure 4). All soap bars to be processed in these lines were brought from plodders on the adjacent floor of B-14 (FOURTH FLOOR, HOTEL SOAP LINES TO NORTHWEST...; FOURTH FLOOR, DETAIL OF HOTEL SOAP LINE TO NORTH...; FOURTH FLOOR, DETAIL OF HOTEL SOAP LINE TO WEST...).

D. Site:

B-15 was located on the east side of Greene Street, between B-1 and B-14, facing G Block and backed by the B Block alley (Figure 1).

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Original Architectural Drawings:

Colgate-Palmolive Company retains a small number of 20th-century linen or blueprint copies of plans and drawings made for B-15. Drawings listed below pertain to the structure and major equipment elements; a few other plans of operating hardware are not listed. The relatively unchanged nature of B-15 and its industrial uses evidently required few documented changes. As of late 1989, the drawings are maintained by the engineering department in the plant's L Block (HAER No. NJ-71-SS). Future researchers should contact the company's Office of Corporate Communications at 300 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10022.

Colgate & Company/Colgate-Palmolive-Peet Company/Colgate-Palmolive Company

1906	Basement Plan B-Building (B-15). Dwg. No. 2-1142.
n.d.	Typical Floor Plan. Dwg. No. 2-1884. [c1906?]
1927	East Elevation, Building B-15 at Driveway. Dwg. No. 2-1179.
1943	Rearrangement of Hotel Soaplines/4th Floor. Dwg. No. 2-2483.
1971	First Floor Plan of B-1, B-2, B-14, & B-15. Dwg. No. 2-6353.
1973	Plan B-15-3. Reinforce Floor and Install Steel Plate. Dwg No. 2-6767.
1975	Monorail for B-15-1. Monorail Frame. Dwg. No. 2-7289.

B. Historic Views:

The Greene Street facade of B-15 appears in a few historic streetscape photographs, such as the one on page 172 of Farrier 1879, but all such views appear the same. Because aerial photographs of the Jersey City plant were invariably taken from the east, only the roof of B-15 sometimes appears in such views. One historic interior view, probably taken in the 1920s, shows several women (partly in focus) packing shaving soap in what is probably B-15 east; for access to this view, contact the Colgate-Palmolive Company's Office of Corporate Communications at 300 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10022.

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Colgate & Company

- n.d. Untitled ledger, labelled "2/see list" on cover, with entries 1847-93. As of late 1989, on file, Colgate-Palmolive Co., Jersey City, NJ, in L Block (HAER No. NJ-71-SS).

Colgate-Palmolive Company

- 1974 Home Office Industrial Engineering Manual - Jersey City Plant. On file, Colgate-Palmolive Co., Jersey City, NJ, in Building L-1 (HAER No. NJ-71-SS).
- 1986 Jersey City Plant, Environmental Cleanup Responsibility Act (ECRA) - II. Site Evaluation Submission. On file, Colgate-Palmolive Co., Jersey City, NJ, in Building L-1 (HAER No. NJ-71-SS).

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The Pulse III,8: 3-5.

E. Likely sources not yet investigated:

Building permit records maintained by Colgate-Palmolive Company and/or the City of Jersey City may have information on some 20th-century alterations to B-15.

#### PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Colgate-Palmolive Company began phasing out its Jersey City operations in 1985, moving them to other company plants. In 1987, the company announced plans to demolish the plant beginning in 1988, and to redevelop the 34-acre site for mixed commercial, residential, and commercial use. Recognizing the plant's historic significance, Colgate-Palmolive donated historical, descriptive, and photographic data on the office building to the Historic American Engineering Record. B-15 was demolished in 1989.

Project manager and industrial historian:

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Architectural historian:

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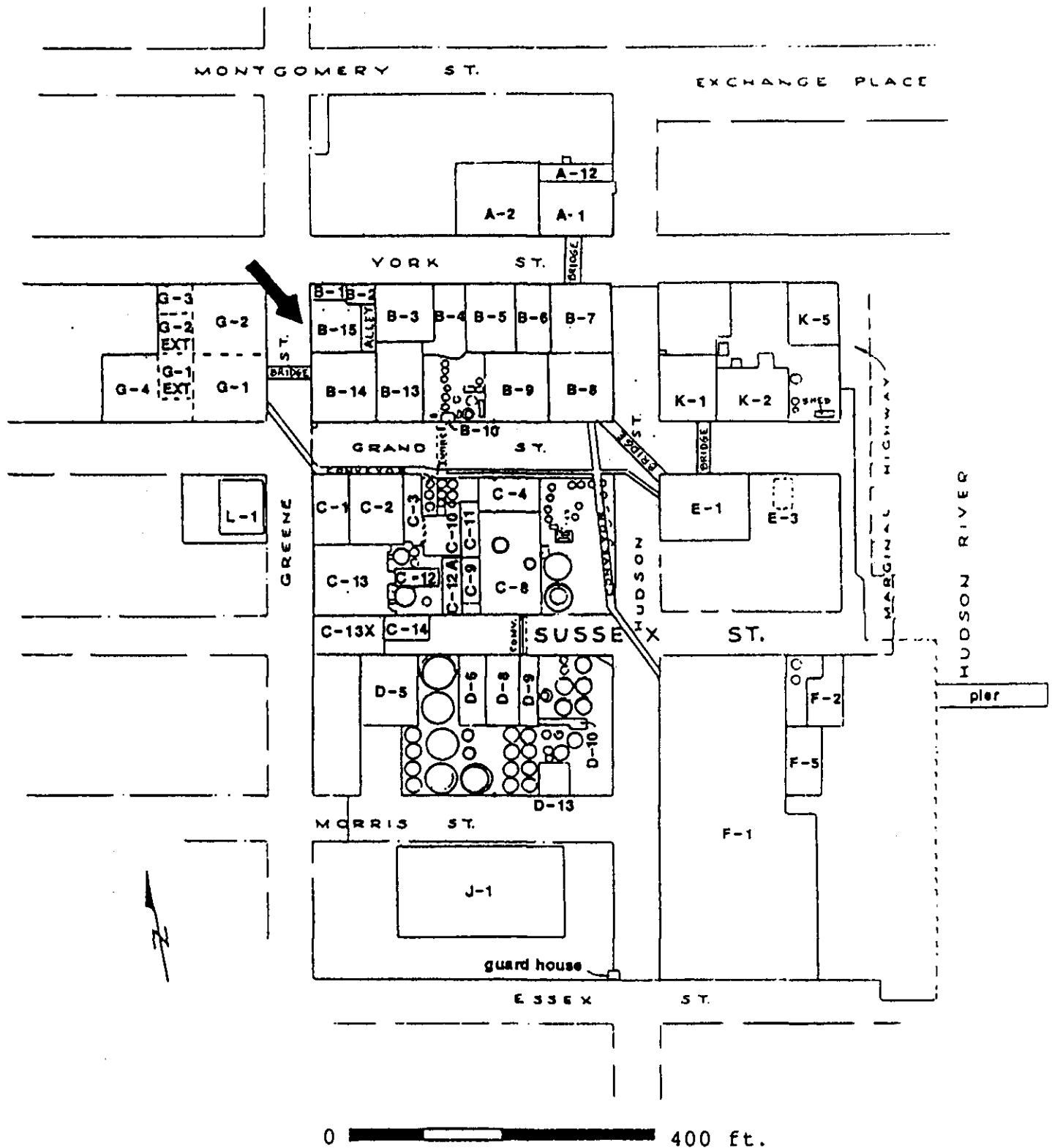


Figure 1. LOCATION OF B-15 AT COLGATE JERSEY CITY PLANT